

Letter from Theodore Herzl to Yussuf Zia al-Khalidi - Mayor of Jerusalem – 1899
Youssuf Zia Al-Khalidi, former mayor of Jerusalem, wrote to Zadok Kahn, Chief Rabbi of France Date: Wednesday, 1 Mar 1899
At the beginning of March 1899, a Muslim former mayor of Jerusalem who was well known for his religious toleration, Youssuf al-Khalidi, wrote a letter to Zadoc Kahn, the Chief Rabbi of France. Al-Khalidi (1829-1906), who had been an Ottoman consul in Russia and had taught Arabic in Vienna, was fluent in several foreign languages, including French, English, Turkish and Kurdish. He wrote in French[1], which was then the language of international diplomacy. Having become alarmed about the Zionist aims for Palestine, he told Kahn that the plan to create a Jewish state in Palestine could not be implemented, due to the opposition of the Turks and the local population. Al-Khalidi suggested that the Jews would do better if they went elsewhere. Al-Khalidi asked “Au nom de Dieu, laissez la Palestine en paix” (In the name of God, let Palestine be left in peace). Rabbi Kahn forwarded the letter to Theodor Herzl, asking him to reply to al-Khalidi.
Letter from Theodore Herzl to Yussuf Zia Al-Khalidi, Mayor of Jerusalem
Wien-Wahring Carl Ludwigstrasse 50 19 March 1899
Excellency,
I owe to Mr. Zadok Kahn’s kindness the pleasure of having read the letter which you addressed to him. Let me tell you first of all that the feelings of friendship which you express for the Jewish people inspire in me the deepest appreciation. The Jews have been, are, and will be the best friends of Turkey since the day when Sultan Selim opened his Empire to the persecuted Jews of Spain. And this friendship consists not only of words – it is ready to be transferred into acts and to aid the Moslems. The Zionist idea, of which I am the humble servant, has no hostile tendency toward the Ottoman Government, but quite to the contrary this movement is concerned with opening up new resources for the Ottoman Empire. In allowing immigration to a number of Jews bringing their intelligence, their financial acumen and their means of enterprise to the country, no one can doubt that the well-being of the entire country would be the happy result. It is necessary to understand this, and make it known to everybody. As Your Excellency said very well in your letter to the Grand Rabbi, the Jews have no belligerent Power behind them, neither are they themselves of a warlike nature. They are a completely peaceful element, and very content if they are left in peace. Therefore, there is absolutely nothing to fear from their immigration. The question of the Holy Places? But no one thinks of ever touching those. As I have said and written many times: These places have lost forever the faculty of belonging exclusively to one faith, to one race or to one people. The Holy Places are and will remain holy for all the world, for the Moslems as for the Christians as for the Jews. The universal peace which all men of good will ardently hope for will have its symbol in a brotherly union in the Holy Places. You see another difficulty, Excellency, in the existence of the non-Jewish population in Palestine. But who would think of sending them away? It is their well-being, their individual wealth which we will increase by bringing in our own. Do you think that an Arab who owns land or a house in Palestine worth three or four thousand francs will be very angry to see the price of his land rise in a short time, to see it rise five and ten times in value perhaps in a few months? Moreover, that will necessarily happen with the arrival of the Jews. That is what the indigenous population must realize, that they will gain excellent brothers as the Sultan will gain faithful and good subjects who will make this province flourish, this province which is their historic homeland. When one looks at the situation in this light, which is the ~ one, one must be the friend of Zionism when one is the Friend of Turkey. I hope, Excellency, that these few explanations will suffice to give you a little more sympathy for our movement. You tell Mr. Zadok Kahn that the Jews would do better to go somewhere else. That may well happen the day we realize that Turkey does not understand the enormous advantages which our movement offers it. We have explained our aim publicly, sincerely and loyally. I have had submitted to His Majesty the Sultan some general propositions, and I am pleased to believe that the extreme clearness of his mind will make him accept in principle the idea of which one can afterwards discuss the details of execution. If he will not accept it, we will search and believe me, we will find elsewhere what we need. But then Turkey will have lost its last chance to regulate its finances and to recover its economic vigor. It is a sincere friend of the Turks who tells you these things today. Remember that! And accept, Excellency, the assurance of my very high consideration.  (signed) Dr. Theodore HERZL